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Magazine Advertising Layout and Design: 1932-1982

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In looking at magazines of fifty years ago, or even those of more recent vintage, it is obvious that there is a different look to the advertisements. This study uses a content analysis of both individual layout components and overall layout type to examine the evolution of the graphics of magazine advertising. Results point to trends during the fifty-year period and suggest the need for a new category of layout design.

Magazine advertisements of fifty years ago have a very different look than advertisements today. Beyond the obvious differences in the hair styles and clothing of models and the changes in product packaging, older ads have a distinctive feeling that contemporary advertisements do not have. A large part of this different quality may be attributed to various elements of the graphic makeup of the ads. The current study is an attempt to map the changes in both the individual graphic elements and overall layout design that have occurred during the last half century. Additionally, the study looks at the frequency of the various types of layouts in order to determine if, indeed, some evolutionary process occurs in popular layout types.

Magazine advertisements have been a continuing source of interest to scholars. Indeed, a number of researchers have specifically focused on the graphic components of magazine ads. Assael, Kofron, and Burgi (1) identified categories of print characteristics (e.g., color with illustration vs. no color with illustration; bleed vs. no bleed; layout of multiple illustrations vs. square or horizontal vs. all other shapes) and found that bleed page and shape of the major illustrations tended to be more important in predicting measures of attention. Valiente (20) studied a number of mechanical features of ads and found that such variables were more related to Starch "noted" scores than were content variables.

Rossiter (16) focused on both visual and verbal syntax variables that might add to previously used mechanical measurement and prediction. Rossiter found that visual and verbal mechanical variables were as good as message variables in predicting Starch "noted" and "associated" scores. Syntax, in this context, means symbol type and arrangement, not symbol meaning or semantics. Rossiter explained that syntax for visual stimuli in advertising is represented by types of visual elements: products, people, situations, etc., and that the arrangement of these elements was analogous to sentence length and structure. Similarly, it is not the inherent meaning of these elements, but rather the mechanical arrangement of them, that is particularly pertinent to the present study.

Holbrook and Lehmann (8), using Starch scores as a measure of readership, looked at the importance of form versus content in magazine advertisements. They found that a combination of mechanical, message, and product-category variables gave a far better prediction of readership than did message variables alone. Mechanical measures used included color versus non-color, number of typefaces, and other facets of layout.

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Surlin and Kosak (19) tested the effects of shapes of illustrations and found the circle to be more related to positive ad evaluations than the traditional rectangle used by advertisers. Such results, however, may be related to the novelty of a circular illustration.

A number of component parts of the layout were identified by Hendon (7) in a review of studies of the effects of mechanical factors on advertising perception. Specifically, size of illustrations, number of colors, type sizes, number of illustrations, and number of copy units or copy blocks have been shown to be related to recognition scores.

High and low involvement products have been cross-tabulated with Starch scores (10). Information content of magazine advertisements has been analyzed (18) as well as Starch scores related to format variables (3).

In summary, the attention to mechanical or graphic component elements of advertising has primarily focused on their relative influence on ad recognition, ad readership, and product evaluation. The study most relevant to the current discussion is one by Reid, Rotfeld and Barnes, (14) which examined the relationship between kinds of layouts and Starch scores over a period of nine years for five different magazines. Results showed that copy-heavy and type-specimen layout designs are less effective than other designs at attention getting. No studies to date, however, have attempted to trace the evolution of layout styles and/or the use of layout components.

Utilizing many of the categories of graphic ad components included in previous studies, the present study will show not only if styles and formats have changed over the past fifty years, but also, how the use of individual components of magazine advertising design has changed.

It is hypothesized that the older advertisements—those of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s—will include more elements, more copy blocks, more words in the headlines, more illustrations, etc., and that this fact accounts for the look of these ads, which is very

different from those of the 1980s. The study also posits the question: are the “old reliable” formats still viable, or should there be a new category of layout?

Methodology

The Sample. Two magazines, *Time* and *Saturday Evening Post*, were chosen for the study, as it was felt that these magazines represented “main stream” publications that were extant fifty years ago and are still on newsstands today. Because of the change in frequency of publication by the *Saturday Evening Post* from a weekly to a bi-monthly in recent years, it was at first not considered. It was felt, however, that this problem was outweighed by the fact that the *Saturday Evening Post*, for over half the period studied, was, as noted by J.P. Wood (22), probably the strongest weekly magazine and was almost a symbol of the country itself (21).

The selection of the period from 1932 to 1982 recognized the profound changes that occurred in the United States during those years, i.e., the reform years of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Great Depression, World War II, the “back-to-traditional-values” period of the 1950s, the Viet Nam War era, and the recessionary period up to 1982. In addition to providing a broad historical viewpoint, this 50-year period provided a significant sample of advertising layouts.

A total of 513 full or double-page advertisements were evaluated with systematic sampling procedures used for selection of both magazine issues and specific advertisements. Issues of *Time* were selected from the years 1937, 1947, 1957, 1967, 1977, and 1982. Similarly, issues of the *Saturday Evening Post* from 1932, 1942, 1952, 1962, 1972, and 1982 were included. Beginning with a random selection of January, February, or March, the first issue of every third month was systematically included. Similarly, every third full or double-page advertisement was included, counting from a randomly chosen starting point.

Measurement. In evaluating advertising graphics, it is of interest to analyze changes both in the individual components of the graphic design and the overall layout type. Seven separate layout components, based in part on previous studies (7, 8, 16, 19), were measured for each ad. The number of type faces, number of illustrations, number of people in the ad, number of words in the headline, number of sub-heads and number of different copy blocks were recorded as actual raw counts. The copy length was identified as short (under 50 words), medium (50 to 100 words), or long (over 100 words).

The 11 categories used for classification of layout types are those frequently discussed in advertising literature and found in several lists of layout types in advertising texts by Nelson (12), Jewler (9) and Moriarty (11).

A *picture window* layout is basically a large picture or illustration with tightly edited copy fitting into the small space allotted to it (12:130). One cautionary note must be made: the results reported for the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s are the result of designating all advertisements with a dominant illustration and relatively short copy as picture window. While they are akin to the present picture window ads, the earlier ads rarely had as large an illustration as those from 1960 on, nor did they have the contemporary look of those from the 1960s to the present.

A *Mondrian* layout is based on the paintings of the Dutch painter, Piet Mondrian. In his paintings, space is broken into a series of severely demarcated rectangles. A *grid* layout is similar to the Mondrian except that, instead of various-sized rectangles, the space is divided into even-sized boxes. The use of grid layout design is most observable in newspaper advertising, particularly in grocery store ads.

Type-specimen layouts exhibit large type size with no illustration so that the type itself serves as a significant visual element. *Copy-heavy* layouts are closely related to type-specimen layouts, relying on words to get the message across. There is often no illustration, or only a small visual carrying

little weight in the communication of the message. The copy-heavy advertisements are serious, with many points to be made in one ad.

The *frame* layout has traditionally been thought of as having art work or illustrative material framing the copy. In this study, advertisements that had copy framing the illustration(s) as well as advertisements with illustrations framing the copy were considered as frame layouts. It is too arbitrary to consider a layout a frame only when the artwork frames the copy.

In a *silhouette* layout, the designer arranges the elements so that they form an over-all silhouette, or shape, against the background. The more irregular the shape, the more interesting the layout. White or negative space is pushed toward the edges of the ad (9:125). While it can produce a dramatic impact on the reader, it has been an approach virtually ignored by layout artists through the years (12:136).

The *multi-panel* layout started out "... a couple of generations ago with advertisements in the Sunday comic sections, made to look just like the regular fare" (12:136). Jewler, in fact, terms them "comic strip" layouts (9:125).

Circus layouts are similar to multi-panel layouts but generally deal with a larger-than-average number of components. Many grocery store ads, for example, would fall into this category.

The *rebus* layout is one in which photographs, illustrations, or diagrams are inserted into the copy which is usually quite long. As an example, this type of layout is used currently in automobile ads, which show the car, the engine, or certain engineering details inserted into the copy.

Ads that did not fall into any of these 11 categories were coded as "other." With one exception, discussed below, these ads were dissimilar to each other and thus were not identified individually.

Results

Layout Components. As noted, measurements of individual layout components were included in the content

analysis as it was anticipated that much of the historical difference in ad appearance could be attributed to their use. Table 1 presents summary results for six of the individual layout components (number of type faces, number of illustrations, number of people, number of words in headline, number of sub-heads, and number of copy blocks) and results of Newman-Keuls pairwise comparison tests.

For number of type faces there is a significant historical movement toward simplification. Ads of the 1930s included a significantly greater number of type faces than did ads during any later decades. Ads from the 1960s onward had significantly fewer type faces than ads during any of the earlier time periods. In fact, all of the ads studied from the 1930s magazines used at least two different typefaces, and 55 percent included four or more. This fact would appear to play an important part in the relatively cluttered or jumbled appearance of some earlier advertisements. By the 1980s, 30 percent used only a single typeface, and only three percent included as many as four different type styles.

Similarly, there is some indication of a "less is more" trend in the use of illustrations, number of people in ads and number of copy blocks. While, based on the individual decades, significant differences do not always appear, rank ordering of the averages by decade does give some indication of a trend toward simplification in the use of these layout components. All three components were used more frequently during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s and used less during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

For ads of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, more than half included two or more illustrations, while during the decades beginning with the 1960s, less than half used more than one. In fact, nearly three out of four ads (74 percent) of the 1960s used only one illustration or none at all.

Fifty-four percent of all ads during the 1930s used two or more models, while only 37 percent of the 1980s ads included more than one model. In fact, over half (51 percent) of the ads from 1982 included no people at all.

There are no ads included in the sample from the 1930s without copy,

TABLE 1
Magazine Advertising Layout Components by Decade:
Means, (Standard Deviations) and Newman-Keuls Test Results

Decade	Number of Type Styles	Number of Illus- trations	Number of People	Number of Words in Headline	Number of Sub-Heads	Number of Copy Blocks
1930	3.80 ^a (1.35)	2.69 ^a (1.92)	2.31 ^{a,b,c} (2.50)	7.44 ^a (3.85)	1.61 ^a (1.70)	2.07 ^{a,b} (1.51)
1940	3.21 ^b (1.29)	3.05 ^a (3.89)	2.69 ^b (2.68)	7.29 ^a (6.71)	1.07 ^{a,b} (1.43)	2.34 ^{a,b} (2.59)
1950	3.00 ^b (1.34)	2.89 ^a (2.91)	2.48 ^{b,c} (2.80)	8.10 ^a (7.34)	1.45 ^a (1.59)	2.78 ^a (4.18)
1960	1.60 ^c (0.62)	1.49 ^b (1.09)	1.31 ^a (2.01)	9.54 ^a (5.55)	0.59 ^b (0.79)	1.40 ^b (1.49)
1970	1.80 ^c (0.67)	2.32 ^a (1.95)	1.55 ^{a,c} (2.33)	7.98 ^a (4.06)	1.23 ^a (1.69)	1.86 ^{a,b} (2.61)
1980	1.97 ^c (0.85)	2.49 ^a (2.71)	1.52 ^{a,c} (2.50)	7.92 ^a (5.34)	1.66 ^a (2.21)	1.97 ^{a,b} (2.32)

^{a,b,c} Means with the same letters are not significantly different based on Newman-Keuls multiple range test at $p < .05$.

and nearly half (47 percent) had at least two copy blocks. By the 1980s, 14 percent of all ads were without copy and only 25 percent had more than one copy block.

Measures of the number of words included in the headlines and the number of subheads did not show a similar pattern. During all decades, the median number of words for each headline was either six or seven words, with an average of 7.44 to 9.54 words. While the number of subheads did decrease significantly during the 1960s (i.e., mean = .59 and 51 percent of all ads used no subheads), the number used during the 1970s and 1980s increased so that by 1982, 11 percent of all ads had five or more different subheads.

The amount of copy in each ad was classified as short (less than 50 words), medium (50 to 100 words), or long (over 100 words). Table 2 gives percentage results and time series analysis of the length of copy for the ads during each decade included in the study. Again, the decade of the 1960s shows a significant change in the use of longer copy, with only 22 percent of all ads having greater than 100 words. During the period prior to 1960, approximately half or more of all ads contained long copy. In the 1970s, long copy more frequently appeared, and in 1982, again, more than half of the ads surveyed in-

TABLE 2
Magazine Advertising Copy Length
Time Series Analysis of Percentage Use by Decade

Decade	Short	Medium	Long
1930	7	34	59
1940	24	23	53
1950	25	28	47
1960	39	39	22
1970	26	35	39
1980	19	29	52
Intercept	5.85	33.71	60.45
Slope	1.02	.11	-.91
Adjusted R-square	.60	.00	.00

cluded long copy. (Perhaps David Ogilvy's advice was heeded: long copy sells better than short. (13)) Time series analysis shows that the use of short copy (less than 50 words) is significantly related to the passage of time.

Layout Types. Table 3 presents the percent use of various layout types by decade as well as the average for the 50-year period. The overall most frequently used layout type was picture window, which represented 28 percent of all ads evaluated. The use of picture window layouts, however, shows dramatic swings during the period. First, following a slight decrease in popular-

ity in the 1950s, picture window ads represented nearly half (44 percent) of all ads during the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, the use of picture window layouts dramatically decreased to only about 15 percent of the total ads. Other classifications of layout types suggest that, since the 1960s, the popularity of the traditional picture-window ad has substantially diminished.

As previously noted, ads that did not fit into any of the conventional categories were originally designated as "other." It was determined, however, that during the more recent decades, a large number of these ads were very

TABLE 3
Types of Magazine Advertising Layouts
Results of Time Series Analysis and Percent Use by Decade

Type	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	Average	Intercept	Slope	Adjusted R-Square
Picture Window	38	34	27	44	15	16	28	43.87	-4.21	.30
Color Field	-	-	-	13	28	28	11	-12.40	6.84	.81
Mondrian	-	-	3	1	-	2	1	.04	.29	.00
Grid	1	-	1	-	1	2	1	.25	.20	.00
Type Specimen	-	1	2	1	5	6	3	-1.39	1.10	.82
Copy Heavy	4	4	4	3	4	15	6	.46	1.46	.20
Frame	25	11	10	7	7	7	11	21.63	-3.01	.55
Silhouette	3	5	4	10	5	5	5	3.58	.41	.00
Multi-Panel	15	16	19	6	12	2	12	20.58	-2.58	.46
Circus	3	7	5	-	4	6	4	4.23	-.06	.00
Rebus	-	10	7	3	8	7	6	3.26	.72	.00
Other	11	12	19	13	12	5	12	-	-	-

similar and, indeed, appeared to present an additional significant category. Frequently seen were ads with bleed page, usually four color, featuring a large illustration with copy block(s) overprinted on the ads. In general, these ads contain a larger visual than picture window advertisements and are frequently double-page spreads, thus providing a much larger and stronger visual impact than the picture window ads. This type of layout does not fit any of the traditional categories and apparently represents a completely new layout classification. Based on the similarity of this layout classification to a unique movement in art, an appropriate designation would be color field.

The Color Field movement in art was begun by Jules Olitski in 1964. It developed out of Abstract Expressionism, and is almost an expression of revolt against the very busy "scribbled" pattern of that art movement. Color field painting envelops the viewer with color. It takes up the entire field of vision, as the paintings are large scale and wider than the usual viewing cone. The canvas is covered with a color, which is the main expressive element. Additionally, color field painting has a smoothness about it that parallels the smooth, almost polished background of the bleed ads under discussion. Admittedly, the activity of a color field painting is the color itself, while the activity of a color field advertisement involves the illustration copy, headline, etc. Nevertheless, as a descriptive term, color field can speak to a particular type of layout design, larger in visual impact than others. This greater impact results from the "infinity" background. The ads are always in color, always bleed, and in many cases are double-page spreads, so that their very size compares to the "outsize" color field paintings.

The color field ads represented 13 percent of all ads in the 1960s and 28 percent of all 1970s and 1980s ads.

Multi-panel and frame ads were also frequently seen. However, the use of these two layout types decreased in more recent years, with only about two percent of 1980s ads of each type. Copy

heavy ads, which represented less than five percent of all ads through 1970, were more frequently seen in the 1980s magazines, with 15 percent of all ads of this type.

The grid, Mondrian, silhouette, and circus layout designs were used infrequently (five percent or less of all ads), and their use appears not to have changed during the survey period.

In evaluating layout type, it is of interest to determine if, indeed, differences in the proportion of various classifications represent a significant trend. Table 3 also presents the results of time series analysis based on the percentage of ads during each period that fall into the various layout classifications. The adjusted R-square statistic is a measure of the proportion of change in each style that can be accounted for by the passage of time.

For the frame, color field, and type specimen classifications, R-squares greater than .50 indicate that over half of the variance in frequency of usage can be accounted for by the passage of time. Type specimen ads were not used in the 1930s at all, but six percent of all ads in the 1980s were of this category. The use of multi-panel ads, following the apparent trend toward cleaner ads, decreased from 15 to 19 percent of all ads during the period 1930-1950 to only two percent in the 1980s.

Frame ads also have decreased in popularity, with one out of four 1930s

ads of this type and only seven percent of the 1960s to 1980s ads.

The color field ads, as mentioned, were not seen until 1960, and during the 1970s and 1980s more than one out of every four ads (28 percent) were of this new design.

Color. A final measure of interest was the use of color (See Table 4). Despite technological advancements in the use of color, over one-fourth of all ads in the 1980s (26 percent) are still black and white. Time series analysis shows that, indeed, the use of color is very much related to the passage of time, with increases in 4-color ads from 31 percent in the 1930s to 68 percent in the 1980s.

Conclusions

There are two major findings of this content analysis of advertising layouts. First, it appears that the decade of the 1960s was a real watermark. There are significant differences in the use of various layout components between the period of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s and the years following. Specifically, there appears to have been a move toward simplification evidenced by the use of fewer type styles, fewer illustrations, fewer words in headlines, and fewer people included in visual portions of the ads during the later period. In fine arts, for every movement, there follows a counter-movement. Similarly,

TABLE 4
Use of Color in Magazine Advertising Layout
Time Series Analysis of Percentage Use by Decade

Decade	Spot	4-Color	Black and White
1930	14.29	31.43	54.29
1940	7.32	42.68	50.00
1950	7.08	42.21	40.71
1960	4.17	55.56	40.28
1970	2.35	69.41	28.24
1980	5.68	68.18	26.14
Intercept	12.90	23.85	60.59
Slope	- 1.74	7.92	- 5.90
Adjusted R-square	.54	.91	.95

the almost cluttered look of the 1930s through the 1950s was followed in the 1960s by a simpler, cleaner and purer use of space. While only two layout components evidence significant differences in the use between the 1960s and the later decades, the number of elements used during the 1970s and 1980s is greater for five of the six components measured. This fact may suggest that a movement back toward a busier look in advertising layouts is under way.

Additionally, there is a significant change in the use of various layout types between the early and later decades. The more cluttered layout styles, i.e., multi-panel and frame, decreased in popularity, while there emerged a new classification that was simple, uncluttered and bold.

It has been suggested that the upsurge of creativity in the 1960s was a creative revolution (4:218-271). Indeed, in advertising, the decade of the 1960s provided a definite break with earlier years, giving rise to the contemporary look of today. During the 1960s, the picture-window layout design was at the apex of its popularity. Doyle/Dane/Bernbach, for instance, is noted for its extremely successful use of picture window ads, exemplified by their famed Volkswagen campaign (17:79). The 1960s also saw the beginning of a new layout type that was cleaner and more visually intense. It would quickly surpass the picture window in popularity. One label previously ascribed to bleed ads with large illustrations is a "poster" ad (2:348, 5:420, 6:86). A poster layout, however, is almost entirely visual. On the other hand, the four-color ad seen most frequently has relatively long copy. Thus, the term poster does not describe or suggest this particular type of layout design.

As noted earlier, there appears to be a need for a new designation for the kind of layout that has become increasingly popular, i.e., a four-color, bleed, large illustration with copy overprinted ad. Despite its frequent use, this layout design has no home in the usual list of layout types, thus hindering not only students of layout design, but also

scholars who are looking at mechanical factors in magazine advertisements. It is a challenge to add a new category to the list that has served so long and so well. It is, therefore, suggested that the term color field is an appropriate designation for this layout classification.

As far as future implications are concerned, as art movements are reactive and often cyclical in nature, so layout designs may be cyclical. The Mondrian layout design waxes and wanes (12:107) as does type specimen, to name two examples. As computer graphics become more important, other changes in layout design can be expected, ones that at this writing are impossible to predict. It remains for future studies of layout to track what outside influences produce such changes.

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